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NEW ROADS TO FAMILIAR PLACES: A LIFE-LONG CONSCIOUSNESS TRAVELER REFLECTS ON THE FOCUS LEVELS

by Natalie Sudman

Natalie Sudman worked as an archeologist in the Great Basin states for 16 years before accepting a position managing construction contracts in Iraq. After being injured in Iraq, she retired from government service to concentrate on art and writing, both long-time passions. Raised in Minnesota, Natalie has lived most of her adult life in eastern Oregon, Montana, and South Dakota. She recently moved to southern Arizona where she is setting up an art studio, offering readings, and plotting future travel adventures. Her artwork is available through Davis & Cline Galleries in Ashland Oregon. A book detailing her near-death experience in Iraq will be published by Ozark Mountain Publishing in 2012.

In 1988, one of Robert Monroe's books found me in a used bookstore in Oregon. I bought the book and devoured it in one sitting, quite excited. Using Bob's instructions as a guide, I immediately set out to travel out of body, and accomplished that goal within a couple of weeks.

I didn't keep up with out-of-body travel, though, finding that I moved more easily and quickly through dimensions without the astral body. I don't know what that sort of travel is named–I'll call it "consciousness travel." One moment I am aware of being a consciousness in this physical body, and the next I am in a nonphysical place as pure consciousness. I've done this ever since I can remember, so, for me, it's effortless. OBE travel seemed slow and ponderous in comparison.

Besides consciousness travel, since childhood I've seen things before they happen, sensed the history of certain buildings and landscapes, and conversed and worked with nonphysical beings. Before reading Bob's book, though, I'd never really applied concerted discipline toward learning to control when my sixth sense would function. I didn't apply effort toward learning to control when I traveled to nonphysical places, where I went when I traveled, nor what I did when I got there. Sensing nonphysical beings that needed assistance seemed like a random occurrence over which I had little control. During my work as an archeologist, I would often "see" buried sites before digging confirmed their existence, but those occurrences were intermittent. I had dabbled in meditation, given energy and psychic readings for friends once in awhile, and practiced energetic healing when the whim struck me. Now, having found that a few weeks of disciplined practice in out-of-body travel gave me a new and interesting level of experience, I have applied that discipline to attaining some control over my consciousness travel and related experiences.

Eventually, this led to deeper explorations of the places and skills previously familiar through my intermittent experiences. I found that I could consistently meet up with familiar nonphysical beings by putting myself into deep meditation. In honing meditation skills and control over when and where I traveled, I was also able to access the sixth sense more consistently. The applied discipline deepened my use and understanding of healing levels; allowed me to consciously choose when and how to help nonphysical beings who are “stuck”; and helped me to make better use of rejuvenation environments (places to rest, and/or restore energy when I am exhausted), among other things. I did not consider myself adept, but I was improving.

In 2007, nearly 20 years after first reading Bob’s book, I was working for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq when the vehicle I was traveling in was hit with a roadside bomb. At the moment of the explosion, I left my body, moving immediately to a place that was deeply familiar and wonderfully relaxing after the frenetic pace of working in Iraq. I won’t recount that experience here, as its conceptual description is rather complex. I’ve written a book detailing the experience, to be published by Ozark Mountain Publishing in 2012. All I will say here is that the experience confirmed and expanded my understanding of the nonphysical realms. It also reignited my resolve to continue exploring.

Physical injuries from the roadside bomb landed me in Walter Reed Army Medical Center for a month and then kept me nearby in Maryland for 2 years as I continued outpatient treatment. Early on in this process, I was lolling around the house in a drug-induced drift when The Monroe Institute® (TMI) popped into my mind, though I hadn’t thought of Bob’s book in at least 5 years (probably every TMI alumni will understand that “coincidence”). Back in the 1990s, I had looked up the location of TMI, and I was almost certain that it was located close to where I was recovering in Maryland. In the 1990s, I’d judged the programs at TMI to be beyond my budget. But in 2007, as I was recovering from my injuries, I was pleased to admit that I could afford to attend a program and equally pleased to confirm that TMI was within a 3-hour drive of where I was living. When the surgeries and rehab exercises had tapered off, I took enthusiastic advantage of my proximity to the Institute, attending three courses: GATEWAY VOYAGE®, LIFELINE®, and GUIDELINES.

Familiar with the organization of Bob Monroe’s specific Focus Levels, I had never correlated them to the places I was familiar with from my own experiences of consciousness travel. On arriving at The Monroe Institute for the GATEWAY program, I must have unconsciously assumed that I would be introduced to entirely new and strange places I was as yet unable to access. After all, Bob was a master; I felt that I was little more than a tinkerer in comparison.

Upon being guided to Focus 10, I was surprised to find myself in a familiar location. “Hey,” I thought with some confusion, “this is where I spend most of my waking life!” I often move in and out of Focus 10 as I go about my daily business. For better or worse, much of daily life bores me, and, for as long as I can remember, I’ve let my mind wander off to F10 while my

body completes its tasks in the physical. (Before you ask, yes, some people refer to me as a space cadet!) I suspect most children do this quite naturally and easily until it's either unlearned through culture or the skill fades as a natural result of being in a physical body. For whatever reason, I retained the habit.

We Gateway Voyagers moved on to Focus 12, and I found that F12 is where I often go to rest and create things in my physical life by creating them here first with my imagination. As we moved into Focus 15, I at first thought, "Finally! A place I haven't been before." But moving around within F15, I was drawn to a specific area and found that this area of F-15, too, was intimately familiar. It's where I go almost daily to perform deep healing work and to gain deep rest. It's also an excellent place from which to create, and it is where I sometimes meet up with specific nonphysical beings who work with me on various tasks.

Whether Focus Levels were new or familiar to me did not detract from the GATEWAY experience. Spending a whole week exploring without the distractions of daily life is a valuable luxury, and hearing the stories of others' experiences is always fascinating. It was also the first time I'd been anywhere in over a year without either an armed personal security team or my boyfriend as guide and guard. I didn't realize the significance of this until later: It certainly was a generous place to learn how to negotiate a world that I no longer saw as clearly as I once did due to eye injuries sustained in Iraq. Finally, exploring the nonphysical within the safety net of a group of like-minded people allowed me to access some rather messy personal energy issues related to having been injured in Iraq.

My body doesn't process energy as quickly as my mind does. While my quirky mind is very amused by and quite interested in the fact and consequences of having been blown up, this body is a little less enthusiastic about explosions and injuries, considering it an unwelcome trauma. Thirty years ago, my brother and I took our cat to the vet for a mysterious ailment of the cat's eye. The vet peeled back the cat's inner eyelid with a pair of tweezers, and suddenly I felt all the blood rush from my head and I had to will myself not to faint. I was shocked and perplexed by this extreme physical reaction, which my mind considered baseless and bizarre. I was suddenly vividly aware that I was a consciousness sitting within–at this very moment–a physical body that somehow held its own separate memory bank. I could recount many other similar incidents throughout my life, and I am still most often startled and perplexed by the depth and strength of the body's memory (duh!).

TMI provided the space and structure to go into and clear some of that physical body trauma from the explosion and aftermath, and to do it without scaring my boyfriend at home with extended withdrawals from consciousness or histrionic emotional outbursts! TMI provided what I refer to as backup. Moving through that sometimes highly charged trauma energy while surrounded by like-minded and sympathetic people, a cautious and nervous part of my mind felt that, should I find myself spinning out of control, the group or an individual would likely be

able to help me ground out of it. Simply knowing that backup was there was almost adequate assurance in and of itself, negating the need to actually call upon it directly.

Regardless of not having been led to entirely new and strange places, my experience of GATEWAY VOYAGE was enjoyable and personally useful. Before I had even completed the week, I was plotting to return for another program. I chose LIFELINE for my next foray. Since childhood I've had many experiences "seeing" and speaking with spirits of people who have passed over, often helping them to move on from some position in which they've become stuck. Being an archeologist perhaps offered me unusual opportunities for this sort of work. Walking mile after mile of transects across Wyoming or South Dakota, or mapping ancient sites, I would often sense the presence of others or find myself experiencing both my own immediate reality and a vivid and detailed internal movie of a whole different reality: that of past events. I would often converse with these nonphysical spirits about their lives and experiences before helping them to move on.

I thought that LIFELINE might help give me new insight or new ideas about that work. Once again, I must have expected, on some level, to discover places that I hadn't experienced on my own because, again, I was surprised to find myself on such familiar ground in the Focus Levels. I immediately connected with the nonphysical friends with whom I have partnered for many years, and we went right to work.

The unfulfilled expectation that I would visit new places was, again, startling without being disappointing. In moving in and out of the Focus Levels all week, it felt as if I were in some way solidifying the places where I've always gone. When I visit a new physical landscape, be it a wildlife refuge or a foreign country, I like to learn the names of plants and animals, the history and geology, or a little of the language of the country. These things help me to ground myself within the context of that particular and specific landscape. Grounding myself in that landscape allows me to navigate with confidence through it and to share my experiences within it. TMI offered some names for the places that I visit beyond the physical, something that I didn't have and now find useful and rewarding. The names and language have allowed me to move with more confidence. Discovering that others recognize these same landscapes has added to the confidence in the way that sharing can often be both comforting and fun.

I also found that I was gaining a new ease in moving between levels. It was certainly fascinating to me that "my" places were the same places that Bob and other TMI explorers visit. Bob Monroe and other TMI alumni, having independently made their way to "my" destinations, offered the ever-vigilant logical, linear, science-trained half of myself some assurance that it needed. It was another drop in my ever-flowing river of proof that energy is real, usable, and relevant, and that the places that I go are not simply vivid imagination or the result of a hard knock to the head. My grandmother was institutionalized for hearing voices and

acting inappropriately in certain circumstances, so perhaps I carry an internal check that desires periodic assurance that I'm not just loopy.

When I signed up for GUIDELINES®, I no longer expected the Focus Levels to be unfamiliar landscapes–and they weren't. I was, however, startled by the depth of experience that came forth during the lab Personal Resources Exploration Program (PREP) session.[1] Having Skip as a "control" sitting in the next room–another backup–allowed me to let go and explore further than I might have without him there as a safety net ready to bring me back to this particular physical world. In fact, I knew as soon as I walked out of 2 hours of channeling[2] that the lab session was the entire reason I had felt compelled to attend the GUIDELINES program. I had channeled before in a limited way, never letting go fully to allow the nonphysical beings very far into my body nor admitting to anyone that I was receiving this information from a nonphysical being separate from myself. I had held back because I'd had some reservations about whether I would get the body back for myself, and I didn't often interact with people who would accept it were I to admit that I was channeling.

In addition to the safety net that the presence of Skip provided for my cautious mind, the simple fact that someone else had listened to the information I had channeled proved to be important. This was information that I'd received previously on more than one occasion yet never shared with anyone. Some specific information seemed too "out there" to talk about, and the rest of it felt as if it could too easily be interpreted as fueling an ego trip when taken out of context. Having shared it now with Skip as monitor, the information somehow took on substance and found a legitimate place inside myself in the same way–again, that learning the names of plants and animals in a landscape that is new to me helps to make me feel more grounded in that place. In that sense, the information I channeled became manifest through having shared it with a respectful fellow human being on the physical plane.

Sharing with people is a powerful and valuable aspect of TMI. In my experience, when two people join together, the power of the All That Is doesn't just double; it multiplies. When 20 people join together for a week of focused energy work, the power available becomes immense, assisting everyone with their own individual work as well as creating a group personality that carries its own unique force that we all experience. Even those of us who attend a program and keep quiet in the background throughout it are adding essential energy to the whole and sharing simply by being present. When we share experience with each other, we share our souls. A respectful audience–for speech or silence– heals and strengthens the soul.

I am looking forward to attending more programs–after all, I may yet be surprised! I may yet find Focus Levels or learn skills that aren't familiar from my own explorations. And whether or not that happens, without a doubt I'll find the space for valuable personal growth. I'll

undoubtedly meet interesting people with which to share stories and experiences, helping to seat me in harmony with life in this physical world.

Endnotes

[1] The Personal Resources Exploration Program (PREP) is a personalized auditory-guidance session conducted in a specially designed, secluded cubical in which the participant is individually supported through customized, computer-generated sounds and verbal guidance provided by a trained facilitator. The PREP session is included as an aspect of the GUIDELINES® program but is also available to GATEWAY graduates. For more information about PREP Sessions, see http://www.monroeinstitute.org/prep/

[2] During the lab session, I channeled four different nonphysical beings. I sensed and watched them trading places in my body, depending upon their individual skill in expressing specific information that was being transmitted. They talked about my role in a physical body at this particular time in physical world history, confirmed my own understanding of the reasons I had chosen to be blown up in Iraq, and discussed some of my skills and the side effects and quirks related to those skills, as well as revealing some information about what many refer to as the "2012 Shift." They explained that The Shift is not a 2012 event; it has been underway for some time now and continues as a gradual creation. It doesn't belong to earth physicality; it's a dimensional shift that could be said to originate anywhere and everywhere at once since all is one. Certain people are embodied right now in order to assist with the energy shift, as the multidimensionality of the energies is complex. The skills of these beings are such that they are more effective from within the physical than they would be without bodies.

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